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ABSTRACT

This booklet, which was produced as a follow-up to the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education, examines monitoring adult learning for knowledge-based policymaking. The following are among the topics discussed in the booklet: (1) the need to reconstruct the reality of adult learning in consideration of the concepts of lifelong learning and formal, nonformal, and informal learning; (2) key issues in monitoring adult learning; (3) the importance of developing a framework for adult education indicators; (4) the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) framework for adult education indicators, which includes indicators related to area (contextual data, input, process, outcome) and levels (individuals, institutions, and region); (5) learning modalities that could possibly be included in the OECD framework; (6) development of a multilayered monitoring and information system and data collection avenues to be included in the system (administrative and institutionally based statistics and survey-based approaches and specialized household surveys); (7) shortcomings of surveys and the importance of process information from the practice of adult education; (8) key results of the first International Adult Literacy Survey; (9) implications of surveys for policymakers; (10) the need for complementary qualitative interpretations; and (11) workshop participants' recommendations regarding improving existing monitoring of adult learning. (MN)

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ED 434 998

A series of 29 booklets documenting workshops held at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education

# 2d Monitoring adult learning

## Monitoring adult learning for knowledge-based policy-making

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This publication has been produced by the UNESCO Institute for Education within the context of the follow-up to the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), held in Hamburg in 1997.

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Theme 2: Improving conditions and quality of adult learning

Booklets under this theme:

2a Universities and the future of adult learning

2b The multiplicity of research on 'Learning for All', a key for the 21st century

2c Global community of adult learning through information and documentation: developing a network of networks

2d Monitoring adult learning for knowledge-based policy-making

2e The politics and policies of the education of adults in a globally transforming society

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# Foreword

In July 1997 the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education was held in Hamburg, organised by UNESCO and in particular the UNESCO Institute for Education, the agency's specialist centre on adult learning policy and research. Approximately 1500 delegates attended from all regions of the world, with representatives of 140 member states and some 400 NGOs. In addition to the work of the commissions and plenary which debated the official documents of the Conference The Hamburg Declaration and The Agenda for the Future, there were 33 workshops organised around the themes and sub-themes of the Conference.

As part of its CONFINTEA follow-up strategy, the UNESCO Institute for Education has produced this series of 29 booklets based on the presentations and discussions held during the Conference. The recordings of all the workshops were transcribed and synthesized over one year, edited, and then formatted and designed. A tremendous amount of work has gone into this process. Linda King, coordinator of the monitoring and information strategy for CONFINTEA, was responsible for overseeing the whole process. Madhu Singh, senior research specialist at UIE, undertook the mammoth task of writing almost all the booklets based on an analysis of the sessions. She was helped in the later stages by Gonzalo Retamal, Uta Papen and Linda King. Christopher McIntosh was technical editor, Matthew Partridge designed the layout and Janna Lowrey was both transcriber and translator.

The booklets are intended to draw out the central issues and concerns of each of the CONFINTEA workshops. They are the memory of an event that marked an important watershed in the field of adult learning. We hope that they will be of use both to those who were able to attend CONFINTEA V and those who were not. We look forward to your comments, feedback and continuing collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Education.

Paul Bélanger,
Director, UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg
and Secretary General of CONFINTEA

# Monitoring adult learning for knowledge-based policy making

## Introduction

The goal of making adult learning a reality for all has led to efforts to improve the comparative knowledge base on adult education and training. Information is needed not only for assessing the dimension of the problem at hand but also for developing a framework for evaluating alternative approaches to the provision of adult learning opportunities and to promoting the participation of the different social groups. Countries are developing projects for collecting valid data, statistics and information on the state and development of adult learning.

This trend is partly driven by the changes brought about by globalisation and the growing demand for information from decision makers and NGOs representing the adult population. Further, new priorities for adult education policy in the perspective of lifelong learning have emerged that require better empirical knowledge and on-going monitoring.

The workshop "Monitoring of Adult Learning For Knowledge-Based Policy Making" at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), held in July 1997 in Hamburg, dealt with the rationale behind monitoring adult learning, the content of monitoring in the field of adult learning as well as with the different approaches. The first part of the workshop, chaired by Heinz Gilomen, Federal Office of Statistics, Switzerland, covered the concepts, definitions, dimensions and levels of monitoring systems. The panellists included Albert Tuijnman, Education and Training Division, OECD, and S.K. Chu, Division of Statistics, UNESCO. The second part of the session discussed qualitative and quantitative methodologies in improving monitoring with respect to the content and heterogeneity of adult learning. The speakers for the second session included Sofia Valdivielso, Canary Islands, and Scott Murray, Special Surveys Division, Statistics, Canada.

While a solid international consensus has emerged on the importance of developing a culture of lifelong learning for all, the need for reliable and comparable information, both qualitative and quantitative, about adult education and training was greatly felt, particularly in monitoring the role which formal, non-formal and informal learning play in an overall system of lifelong learning.

## The context: Reconstructing the reality of adult learning

Economic, social and cultural imperatives, involving profound structural changes across the globe, guide the new interest in adult education. The development of new information technologies, the increased economic globalisation, segmented labour markets, unemployment and underemployment, the changing role of women, the new evolving family structures, the cultural and linguistic diversity through immigration, the increase of ecological consciousness, the close interdependence between the different social, political and economic spheres at the local, national and international level – these are some of the significant changes facing current societies throughout the world.

These changes and their cumulative effects have transformed the aspirations and the social demand for learning. Developments in the labour markets and the globalising world economy provide a major impetus for the increasing demand for adult learning. However, there are equally compelling social and cultural forces. There is an increasing need to recognise and encourage cultural and social diversity. At the same time, the large structural changes engendered by globalisation, technology and demographic factors are threatening to create new forms of social polarisation.

In these new contexts, more self-reliant participation, more informed decisions, more autonomy and more skills are required from people in all areas of life.

The notion of active citizenship is particularly important. This means recognising not only the so-called active populations working in the formal labour market but also those sections of the society existing outside the formal labour market, producing goods and services in the informal and social economies. New social movements from women's groups to environmental initiatives are producing fresh impulses, con-

structing new visions and creating new identities, calling upon the competence and potential contribution of people and stretching their ability to learn and their capacity to intervene. New forms of association are emerging, which are encouraging the participation of all people in their local communities, in voluntary groups, at work, in the national democratic life and in new networking initiatives between countries.

## The new concept of lifelong learning

If we are to meet the challenges of accelerating change, and at the same time foster individual autonomy and creativity, we need a different kind of learning throughout life, which the traditional education system has so far not provided, and cannot provide on its own. It may be argued that those who have slipped through the formal system of initial education, and are least equipped to deal with the problems brought about by rapid changes in society, have the greatest need for education throughout life. However, in a world where knowledge is changing with such speed, all adults will require education at various stages of their lives.

Up to about the late 60s, lifelong education was generally understood as post-school education provided on a recurring basis. It also involved a very large role for governments and was provided mostly within the context of the formal educational system. The new lifelong learning framework is no longer restricted simply to recurrent education, nor to "second chance" programmes for adults who missed out on initial schooling. There is a conceptual shift from education to learning, which includes general education and training, but also serves multiple purposes, ranging from personal development to social, cultural and economic objectives. Lifelong learning means literally learning throughout the life-span, from early childhood to old age.

### Formal, non-formal and informal learning

Implicit in the concept of lifelong learning is the recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning as equally valuable aspects of the overall lifelong learning process. The concept of lifelong learning can be broken into three main categories, which cover all possible learning situations:



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- Formal education is the structured system of learning carried out by educational institutions, including general academic studies as well as specialised professional training activities. Institutions of formal education are increasingly opening their doors to adults.

- Non-formal education is basically perceived as any organised educational effort outside the formal system, with an identifiable clientele and specific learning objectives.

- Informal learning may be described as the lifelong process whereby all individuals acquire attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and from educative influences and resources in their environment.

Learning happens all the time at many levels throughout society. Most of it takes place in informal settings. Adults may learn new skills in order to qualify for jobs, to solve personal problems, or simply to enrich their lives.

The new concept of adult learning recognises the increasing overlap between the world of work and the world of learning. Much learning is taking place on-the-job and in the community, and there are many examples of employers setting up training schools. At the other end of the spectrum, schools are setting up their own businesses and providing opportunities for students to learn through hands-on experience. Viewed in this context, the concept of adult learning becomes very much broader than literacy promotion development or remedial education.

The new concept gives much greater emphasis to the demand for learning and the capacity and motivation of learners to be self-directed. It also pays greater attention to the long-term organisational aspects of learning throughout life.

Providers of informal learning opportunities are aware of being involved in wider learning processes. Such organised learning, while not highly structured, is to some extent planned and deliberate. It is often designed to help people to solve problems and tackle issues confronting them in their everyday lives.

Increasingly, however, non-formal education programmes, especially in the voluntary and community sectors, involve partnerships with formal institutions as a way of increasing learning opportunities and achieving a measure of formal recognition.

## Key issues in monitoring adult learning

Policy-makers, managers of adult educational programmes, potential learners and even the general public these days are asking a variety of questions:

- What kind of adult educational programmes are available? Where? When? For whom?
- Which are the agencies/bodies/institutions that organise or support adult educational programmes?
- Who are the learners? Gender? Age-group? Socio-economic profile? Preferences?
- How do they participate in adult education in terms of access, completion, learning outcomes?
- How do the adult educational programmes rate in terms of relevance, quality, and efficiency?
- Why are certain potential learners not participating in adult education?

In addition there is the need for information on the adequacy of human, financial and material resource inputs into adult learning, and their use for attaining the learning objectives in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

Using these basic questions as the point of departure, UNESCO has in 1991 started the development of an international methodology for monitoring organised adult and non-formal educational activities that have not been covered under the regular school statistics. The first part of the methodology focuses on aspects of the supply of adult education, by developing methods and techniques for collecting information from adult education institutions and programmes at the national level. The purpose is to build national monitoring information systems and data-bases that would provide relevant information for policy-making, coordination and programme management on the suppliers and sponsors of adult education as well as on the kind of programmes available. It will facilitate and promote increasing participation amongst potential learners. A preliminary "Manual for Statistics on Adult and Non-formal Education" was prepared in 1992 and revised in 1996, for use as reference by interested countries and agencies.

A parallel and complementary approach to the monitoring of adult education is to collect information from the learners (past, present and potential) regarding the demand for adult education. This includes access to information on existing or forthcoming programmes, participation in the programmes, failure or successful completion, the learning experience and perception on the quality of the programmes, impact on employment, earnings and quality of life, etc. This will be developed through the use of household surveys and special education surveys. There are various initiatives being taken by different agencies such as the EUROSTAT's Vocational Training Surveys and UNICEF's Multiple Indicators Cluster Surveys, and other similar household survey programmes such as the USAID's Demographic and Health Surveys, the World Bank's Living Standard Measurement Surveys, etc. They may find it useful to include eventually appropriate questions related to adult and non-formal learning.

## Framework for adult education indicators

Since lifelong learning is becoming an increasingly key factor in people's economic, social and cultural lives, it is important that more systematic knowledge about it be developed. The consensus among policy makers in many countries to work towards lifelong learning for all has added a sense of urgency to the effort to improve the comparative knowledge base on adult education and training.

A framework of adult education statistics and indicators in, say, a particular country can help governments and policy analysts in the following ways:

- providing a comprehensive picture of the existing adult education and training system;
- determining the level and effectiveness of adult education and training;
- showing the relative strengths of different sectors of organised adult learning;
- helping to promote equitable access to and participation in organised adult learning;
- assisting in the formulation of effective policies;
- enabling policy-makers to monitor developments.

The framework for organising adult education indicators provides, in a simplified but systematic form, information on what are widely agreed to be significant features of adult learning and its contexts, and on a range of issues that arise in its functioning and development.

To be useful for monitoring, the required set of indicators should take the following aspects into account:

- different levels and multiple settings, formal, non-formal and informal;
- multiple data sources to provide the information needed for measurement;
- agreement at the national level on standards for the design and measurement of adult learning indicators;
- analytical information about important aspects of adult education in the economy, the cultural world and society as a whole;
- policy-relevant and problem-oriented information that covers broader social considerations within society, such as improvement in qualitative aspects of life, democracy, the development of culture, and equity in race and gender relations.
- The need for information that is amenable to measurement, valid and reliable and readily interpretable by a broad audience.

## The OECD framework for adult learning indicators

Since 1988, the OECD has been carrying out a large-scale international initiative aimed at developing internationally comparable indicators of education. The following tables show a simplified organising framework for adult education indicators as designed by OECD. The listing of indicators is not exhaustive, and depending on purpose and the perspective of the user, different indicator sets might be proposed. Nor are they described in operational terms.

OECD Adult education indicators

| A. Area | B. Levels |
|---|---|
| ■ contextual data | ■ individuals |
| ■ input | ■ institutions |
| ■ process | ■ regional/provincial, national or international |
| ■ outcome | |



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An elaboration of the OECD indicators

■ Individual level

Context: Home/family background, initial educational attainment, age/gender/race/ethnicity, language, labour force status, occupation and earnings;

Input: Learning need, motivation, access to information, time and financial resources;

Processes: Performance, competencies, personal satisfaction;

Output: Instrumental outcomes (job, certificate), wider social economic and cultural outcomes.

■ Institutional level

Context: Type of institute, purpose, relationship to other learning institutions, relationship with employment, culture and community;

Input: Staff development, teachers' salaries, financial resources, operating costs, number of learners, buildings;

Processes: Administrative structures, leadership, structure of learning, instructor:learner ratio, quality of curriculum, monitoring and evaluation of learning;

Output: Learning achievement, attendance rates, graduation rates, cost-effectiveness, sharing results and benefits.

■ Systemic level

Context: Social, cultural and economic system, social demand for learning, prior demand or supply of learning opportunities;

Input: Articulated demand by learning orientation, unit costs, expenditure from public and private sources, adequacy of physical infrastructure;

Processes: Aggregate volume and duration, expenditures before and after government transfers, gaps in institutional coverage, interaction among institutions, structure of incentives;

Output/Impact: Labour force participation, earnings, efficiency, impact on innovation, flexibility, adaptability, wider impacts on economy, culture and society.

It will take time, however, before a common understanding of the important indicators evolves, because of:

- the multiplicity of the educational agents involved;
- the breadth of learning needs;
- the different reasons which people have for participating in educational activities (leisure, personal development, vocational training etc.);
- the diversity of education and training processes.

Some of the possible learning modalities

- formal learning at a distance;
- formal learning in the classroom;
- learning by being informed;
- learning by being shown;
- learning via tests and exercises;
- learning through self-study;
- leaning through research or critical reflection;
- on the job training;
- learning by observations and watching;
- learning by doing;
- informal training on the job;
- informal learning at home;
- informal learning in the community;
- learning in study circles.

Given the sheer scope and volume of the learning activities which are not officially monitored by education authorities, it is clear that the information structure for adult education needs to be diverse yet inclusive i.e. including the heterogeneity of learning processes.

## A multilayered monitoring and information system

A variety of avenues to data collection must be followed in order to include organised learning processes:

Administrative and institutionally based statistics

These have, however, only limited applicability for comparative purposes, because they use institutions as the unit of analysis, and institutions constitute only a small percentage of the providers. Moreover, they differ widely from region to region in terms of the provision of adult learning.

Survey-based approaches and specialised household surveys

Because adult learning is characterised by dispersed provision, diverse financial sources and heterogeneity of participants, it should be monitored through a specific mechanism that allows the collection of up-to-date information about what is happening in this field. Data need to be collected from the point of view of the learners through a sample that is representative of the adult population. A questionnaire should be administered to this population asking them about their participation in organised learning during the last year. An example of this is the First International Literacy Survey (IALS) which was developed with the collaboration of OECD, Statistics, Canada and UIE/UNESCO to permit useful comparisons of literacy and numeracy performance of people with a wide range of abilities, in different countries. The survey, published in 1995, sought to analyse the participation of adults in organised learning. It related literacy ability and adult education participation to broader co-variables such as work, gender, initial education and learning environment. It threw light on the social factors affecting literacy and the kinds of factors that influence people in choosing a field of study or deciding whether to participate in further learning. Adult education participation in this context has been defined as the participation by adults in one or more organised learning events of more than six hours in any area of study. The questions that the survey attempted to answer included the following:

- What is the extent of the learning demand?
- How many adults are involved?
- Who participates in what kind of activities?
- Which social groups are benefiting from the growth of provision?
- Who does not participate?
- What are the barriers and obstacles to participation?

The other approach to monitoring adult learning is including a standardised module of questions in labour-force surveys. Through this approach it has been possible for OECD to relate adult education questions to many background variables related to unemployment and employment. However, it does not include adults above 65 years of age.

### Shortcomings of surveys

Surveys have their uses in documenting the distribution of characteristics through the population and throwing light on the variables affecting a particular feature such as literacy level. But one problem is that social surveys work with relatively small samples of the groups they are studying. In developing countries, the assessment has often involved extrapolation from presumed population growth rates, numbers in school leaving exams, and guess work.

A second problem is that it is very difficult for surveys to capture the more informal types of education or the elusive cultural factors that play such an important role in peoples' educational biographies.

### Process information from the practice of adult education

Information on the process of adult education is needed if data about non-participants and non-formal learning at work and in the community are to be collected.

Workplace surveys, for example, could be used to collect data on the extent of formal and non-formal learning at work and on firms' commitment to human resource development, targeting both employers and workers. Workplace and community surveys emphasise the role of experience and help to locate the organised learning events in their contexts as well as in understanding the relationship between learning and economic or social participation.



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Key results of the first international survey (IALS)

- The adult education population is diverse, encompassing a wide range of ages, educational levels, income brackets and different social and cultural backgrounds.
- Adult education is pursued mostly by the people of higher social status and with higher education. Thus instead of reducing inequalities, adult education seems to be worsening the situation.
- Initial school education in the first cycle of the life span remains a critical factor for further participation in organised learning throughout the adult life span.
- Working contexts are becoming more and more divided between knowledge-intensive production on the one hand and more repetitive work on the other.
- As the private sector becomes the main provider, the concept of adult learning tends to be associated more and more with vocational training and skill orientation.
- A greater proportion of courses or organised learning activities undertaken by women are financed by the participants themselves. Men have 50 per cent more chances than women to have their organised learning activities financed by their employers.
- Even though older people are living longer and show real capacity for self-development, they find themselves being pushed aside more rapidly and permanently.

## Implications of surveys for policy makers

In the light of the key results of the surveys on adult education participation, many policy recommendations have emerged:

- Initial education must be an important point of reference for policy makers in promoting the transition towards learning societies.
- Policy must integrate adult education opportunities with other forms of formal learning at all levels.
- The social determinants of initial and subsequent educational processes should become the object of corrective policies and measures by the government and social partners.
- Policy needs to address institutional, attitudinal and situational barriers to adult learning and the relation between these three barriers.
- Adult learning policy must be coordinated with other policies, in particular with employment, social, economic and cultural policies.
- Governments need to develop new partnerships with the private sector, the social partners and community organisations to overcome barriers to the expansion of adult education and training, and set the policy framework for achieving greater horizontal coordination.
- Since it is utopian to try to bring all people into organised formal education, it is necessary to acknowledge non-formal learning, as well as monitor it, and hence to bring it into the everyday practice of learning.
- Policy should give due regard to learning outcomes if learning throughout the adult life is to be sustained.
- Policy will have to recognise that economic productivity is not an end in itself, but one aspect of human productivity. The divide between work-related and general education is no longer valid. Both are part of a cumulative process that takes place throughout life. Productivity and creativity are not restricted to the technology-intensive industries or limited to a few selected areas of human activity.



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## Need for complementary qualitative interpretations

There needs to be more information on the values and cultures of individual learners in order to take into account the contextual barriers to adult education participation. By using interviews, discussions, case analysis, life histories and real observations, it has been possible to understand the perceptions and choices of individuals, and to go beyond a 'deficit' approach. Qualitative methodology in data collection deals with how an individual deals with real life situations and with interpersonal relationships.

A series of principles for qualitative data collection has emerged from recent investigations:

- biographies as a focus of interpretation;
- recognition of the influence of context;
- disorder and randomness as essential components of learning;
- complex causality rather than linear causality;
- contextualised knowledge acquisition;
- the involvement of the subject in the interpretation of the meanings she/he gives to her/his learning experience;
- observation in every social research.

Recommendations of the workshop participants:

- emphasise the importance of improving the national and international knowledge base and the statistical infrastructure of adult learning;
- endorse the development of a standardised adult learning data collection;
- recommend the further development and extension of the International Survey on adult education participation;
- urge that UNESCO strengthen its functions and programme of work connected with the collection of data of statistics of adult learning, in all its diversity.
- stress the importance of using a wide range of methodologies, including an appropriate balance of quantitative and qualitative methods.

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The CONFINTEA logo, designed by Michael Smitheram of Australia, represents the lines on the palm of a hand. These lines are universal and yet different for each subject. They celebrate cultural diversity and the joy of learning.

# Theme 2

## Improving conditions and quality of adult learning

Booklets under this theme:

a Universities and the future of adult learning
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